

THE ROLE OF THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION IN TOURISM SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article presents a review of the role of therapeutic communication in tourism and hospitality service management, as empathetic, caring, and humanistic communication improves customer satisfaction, staff performance, and organizational competitiveness.

Design/Methodology: The article will utilize a literature review of recent studies in the field, conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach by searching journals, books, and policy documents. Literature and documentary analysis were used to collect data, and thematic analysis was conducted according to Miles and Huberman's (2019) framework. Triangulation was used to ensure validity.

Findings: The results show that therapeutic communication—in the form of face-to-face communication, intercultural adaptation, crisis management, and digital media—has a positive impact on the quality of services provided, customer trust and loyalty, and favorable customer experiences (Abdulaziz et al., 2023; Saez-Ruiz, 2024). It also strengthens employee motivation and resilience, reduces work stress, and facilitates sustainable service management (Liu-Lastres, 2024; Anwar et al., 2024). However, challenges such as lack of employee training, cultural and language barriers, operational pressure, and insufficient digital empathy remain (Arjona-Granados, 2025; Luka, 2024).

Originality: This document is one of the first to synthesize therapeutic communication as a communication tool and management instrument in the tourism and hospitality sector, and therefore significantly contributes to the sustainability of guest experiences, organizational stability, and competitive advantage.

Keywords: *therapeutic communication; tourism; hospitality; customer experience; service management; organizational resilience; employee well-being*

Paper type: Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

Good service quality has been a fundamental pillar of the tourism and hospitality sector, also being a crucial source of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Recent research has shown that excellent service delivery plays a key role in shaping destination image and generating trust among tourists, which consequently increases their loyalty to the destination (Abdulaziz et al., 2023; Khuan et al., 2024). The importance of service excellence in the post-COVID-19 context is even more evident, as restoring trust and restoring traveler engagement will be key to recovery and the ability to grow sustainably (Abdulaziz et al., 2023). In addition to its economic role, high-quality service provides positive and memorable experiences that contribute to a destination's greater likelihood of being recommended by tourists (Abdulaziz et al., 2023). However, the success of staff-tourist interactions remains one of the sector's most pressing issues. Frontline employees often have to work under high pressure, multitask, and meet the needs of customers with widely varying expectations, which, in turn, impacts the quality of their interactions (Saito, 2025). These encounters are further complicated by cultural and linguistic disparities, which can often lead to misunderstandings or conflicts (Arjona- Granados, 2025). Poor internal communication during periods of crisis, such as pandemics or natural disasters, can increase staff stress and anxiety levels, ultimately reducing their effectiveness in working with tourists (Liu-Lastres, 2024).

In this context, therapeutic communication, as a concept based on empathy, caring, and emotional support, has begun to attract interest in tourism and hospitality research. Initially developed in the context of healthcare, its principles have the potential to be transformative in improving staff-tourist interactions, especially when they occur under stressful or high- pressure conditions (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). The introduction of therapeutic communication not only enables staff to learn to manage their own emotional state but also to perceive tourists' emotional needs, facilitating the establishment of a more supportive and inclusive environment (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). While promising, there is a paucity of research on the application of therapeutic communication in tourism and hospitality, and more academic research is needed to evaluate its effectiveness, as well as the obstacles that impede it (Sáez- Ruiz, 2024).

This article seeks to review the existing literature on therapeutic communication as a tool for tourism service management. The main focus is on investigating the potential of empathic and caring communication to improve the quality of interactions between staff and tourists and how these, in turn, predetermine customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, the article addresses the difficulties of applying therapeutic communication in the tourism and hospitality sector and the need to organize staff training and familiarize them with cultural differences (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). Through this review, the article will present useful information that can guide practitioners and academics in creating better communication strategies that are more tailored to human needs in the tourism industry.

The use of therapeutic communication as part of tourism service management also holds great potential, as it can strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty and create a more positive and caring work environment among employees (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). To achieve these results, tourism organizations must integrate therapeutic communication training into staff development, prioritizing active listening, empathy, and emotional control (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). Furthermore, adapting to cultural diversity is crucial, given the heterogeneity of global tourism, to ensure effective and inclusive communication (Arjona-Granados, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this review is grounded in three major frameworks commonly applied in service research: the Service-Profit Chain, Relationship Marketing Theory, and Customer Experience Management (CEM). The Service-Profit Chain explains how employee well-being and internal service quality translate into customer satisfaction and organizational profitability. Relationship Marketing emphasizes long-term, trust-based relationships formed through consistent and empathetic interactions, while CEM focuses on managing customers' cognitive and emotional experiences across all service touchpoints.

By integrating therapeutic communication into these frameworks, this study positions empathy, active listening, and emotional responsiveness not merely as interpersonal skills, but as strategic mechanisms that connect employee well-being, service quality, customer experience, and sustainable competitive advantage in tourism service management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Therapeutic communication is a professional communication technique that focuses on improving people's physical, emotional, and psychological health through targeted and empathetic interactions. This concept highlights the proactive nature of the listener, capable of interpreting both verbal and nonverbal communications and responding supportively and without judgment. Therapeutic communication dates back to the work of Carl Rogers and Richard Farson in 1957, who emphasized the importance of listening for the development of positive interpersonal relationships (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Its core values are the person as the protagonist of the interaction process, active listening, the identification of emotions and experiences, and empathetic and supportive feedback. This does not simply involve an exchange of information but contributes to a sense of safety, respect, and empathy, and, as a result, to better professional interactions and satisfaction with the service provided (Sharma, 2023). The attributes of therapeutic communication involve several key factors, such as active listening, empathy, and sensitivity to people's needs. Active listening involves paying full attention to the message being conveyed, without distraction, and offering feedback that demonstrates understanding. Empathy allows staff or professionals to connect deeply with the emotions of others and provide the necessary support. Attentiveness to people's needs includes a genuine interest in their physical and emotional health, which is manifested in

verbal and nonverbal communication. Other strategies, such as eye contact, open body posture, and sensitivity to body language, also play a crucial role in creating effective therapeutic communication (StatPearls, 2023; Tennant, 2023). Using these principles strengthens relationships by showing respect, trust, and a sense of being heard and valued.

While the principles of therapeutic communication were initially conceived for application in the healthcare field, they can also be extended to education, social services, and tourism. An example of therapeutic communication applicable to the tourism sector includes staff serving guests in an empathetic, stress-free manner, and tailoring services to each individual. This demonstrates the importance of training staff in communication, empathy, and cultural sensitivity to ensure that communication is not only efficient but also emotionally supportive. Cultural diversity, varying expectations, and operational pressures are some of the challenges that can be addressed through systematic and ongoing training strategies. Therefore, therapeutic communication is not just a method but a management approach that leads to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and positive experiences for service recipients (Sharma, 2023; Rivier University, 2023).

Overall, therapeutic communication emphasizes the need to combine the technical and emotional aspects of professional relationships. Active listening and empathy are not only useful for improving communication but also for establishing healthy and lasting relationships between staff and clients. Therapeutic communication practitioners are better equipped to address interpersonal issues, conflict management, and develop more human-centered services. The full incorporation of these principles into professional training and practice can greatly help improve service quality, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as overall organizational performance (Sharma, 2023; CliffsNotes, 2023).

1. Service Management in Tourism

Service management in tourism is a strategic model that balances service quality, customer experience, and operational excellence to create satisfying and memorable travel experiences. Service quality goes beyond physical aspects such as facilities and cleanliness, encompassing emotional aspects and interactions between staff and tourists, factors that significantly influence the overall perception of a destination or facility (Abdulaziz, Khuan, & Peco-Torres, 2023). Customer experience, as one of its key elements, encompasses the entire guest experience, including pre-arrival, direct interactions, and post-service, and focuses on satisfaction, convenience, and value obtained (Khuan et al., 2024). Service excellence, in turn, emphasizes consistency, personalization, and creativity in every encounter, ultimately generating customer loyalty, a good reputation, and a sustainable competitive advantage. Communication

plays a vital role in service management, as without effective communication between staff and tourists, expectations will not be met and the relationship will not last long. Verbal and nonverbal communication impacts the perception of service quality and can be a key factor in the customer experience (Liu-Lastres, 2024). The communication process must be clear, empathetic, and responsive so that staff can recognize guests' needs and preferences, address issues in a timely manner, and provide a safe and pleasant environment. Digital communication through social media, service apps, and online platforms has also gained importance in modern practice to maintain engagement and enhance the reputation of tourism destinations and facilities.

Considering the principles of therapeutic communication in service management can contribute to the effectiveness of interactions and create more rewarding experiences for tourists. Through active listening, empathy, and personalized attention, staff can be better positioned to develop supportive and personalized relationships. This not only improves guest satisfaction but also staff motivation and performance, as they will be able to provide more meaningful services (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). Therefore, empathetic communication is an important differentiation strategy in a highly competitive sector, where positive customer experiences often determine whether they will visit a place again or recommend others.

Service quality and communication excellence go hand in hand to create holistic experiences for tourists. Effective service management practices incorporate physical, emotional, and interpersonal components and generate added value for the customer. Furthermore, service management focused on open and supportive communication helps organizations manage complaints, conflicts, or crises more efficiently, thereby strengthening reputation and competitiveness (Abdulaziz et al., 2023). This demonstrates that communication is not just a support tool, but the core of effective service management strategies.

With the evolution of technology and the ever-increasing customer expectations, staff training in interpersonal and digital communication skills should become a priority for the tourism sector. Flexibility in communication style, adapted to the demands of culturally diverse tourists, is essential for developing inclusive and enjoyable service experiences. The use of professional, empathetic, and adaptive communication practices can help organizations achieve a competitive advantage, a higher number of customers, and memorable travel experiences (Khuan et al., 2024; Liu-Lastres, 2024).

In line with this, service management in tourism is not limited to operational management but also includes the strategic and communicative management of interactions. The combination of service quality, customer experience, service excellence, and efficient

communication is the foundation of sustainable and competitive tourism services. This comprehensive strategy helps organizations prioritize the guest and empower employees to deliver meaningful, consistent, and personalized services.

2. The Relationship between Therapeutic Communication and Service Management

Therapeutic communication is closely related to service management and, in particular, to improving service quality and customer experience. Empathic communication can also be used to enhance staff's understanding of customers' needs, preferences, and emotional states, helping to make each interaction more personal and helpful. By actively listening, showing empathy, and engaging in responsive listening, staff can not only meet, but often exceed, customer expectations, creating a memorable and positive experience. Empathic interactions have been proven to significantly improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, as guests feel acknowledged and appreciated throughout the service delivery process (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). Therapeutic communication also plays an important role in the tourism context, enabling staff to effectively manage stressful situations, conflicts, or service-related issues to ensure the quality of the customer experience in complex circumstances. The connection between therapeutic communication and service management can also be described in terms of the Service-Profit Chain theory, which emphasizes the interdependence between staff satisfaction and well-being, service quality, and organizational profitability. Empathic communication must satisfy customers, motivate staff, boost their performance, and build loyalty, as key elements of the service value chain (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994; updated in 2022). Similarly, relationship marketing theory focuses on long-term relationships between provider and customer, establishing consistent, personalized, and supportive relationships with the customer, in line with the principles of therapeutic communication.

Organizations can build customer loyalty and generate long-term value by fostering empathy- based interactions, which enriches the organization's customer base.

Furthermore, Customer Experience Management (CEM) also emphasizes the need to create comprehensive experiences across all service points. Therapeutic communication integrated into the system can also enable staff to be more responsive to customers' emotional needs, improve the level of interaction, and create a memorable experience every time. Studies indicate that customer satisfaction and positive experiences have a direct impact on loyalty practices, recommendations, and overall evaluations of tourism destinations and organizations (Abdulaziz, Khuan, & Peco-Torres, 2023; Khuan et al., 2024).

The synergy between service management theories and operational practices is also enhanced through the application of therapeutic communication. Organizational

values such as active listening, empathy, and understanding individual needs will help organizations maximize various dimensions of service management, including quality, customer experience, and competitive advantage. Therefore, the concept of empathic communication goes beyond an interpersonal technique, becoming a management approach that can be used to promote operational effectiveness, conflict management, and reputation. This strengthens communication as a strategic element that determines the overall success of service management.

In fact, tourism and hospitality companies that have incorporated therapeutic communication into their service management systems have reported significant increases in customer satisfaction and loyalty. Employees trained in empathic communication are better able to provide more personalized, responsive, and adaptable services, even in complex or stressful situations. Therefore, therapeutic communication not only determines the quality of direct contact but also strengthens long-term relationships between customers and organizations, which is essential for maintaining a competitive advantage in the tourism sector.

In short, the integration of therapeutic communication into service management demonstrates a high degree of coherence between interpersonal principles and management strategies. Such integration promotes the development of holistic customer experiences, greater satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational reputation, and connects employee well-being with service quality and performance. In essence, therapeutic communication is a fundamental aspect of efficient and viable service management approaches in tourism and hospitality.

The Relationship between Therapeutic Communication and Service Management

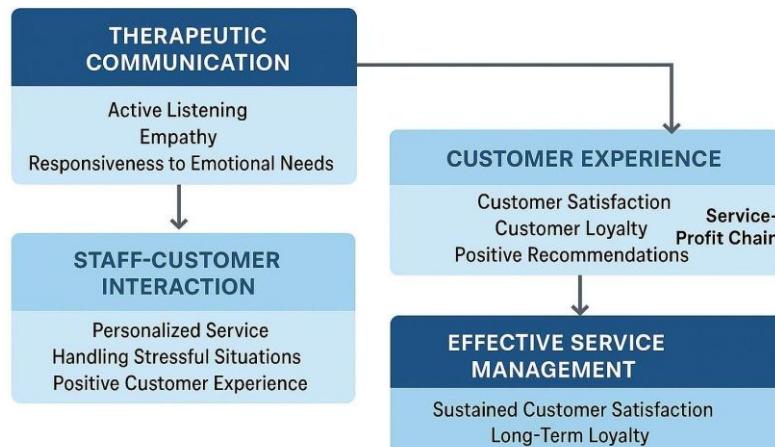


Figure 1. The Relationship between Therapeutic Communication and Service Management. Source: Author, 2025.

The figure presents a flowchart illustrating the interrelation between therapeutic communication and strategic outcomes in service delivery. Beginning with Therapeutic Communication, which focuses on active listening, empathy, and responsiveness to customers' emotional needs, the process continues to Staff-Customer Interaction, emphasizing personalized service, the ability to manage stressful situations, and the creation of positive experiences. This, in turn, shapes the Customer Experience in the form of satisfaction, loyalty, and positive recommendations, supported by the Service-Profit Chain through staff motivation and performance, service quality, and relational marketing. Subsequently, Effective Service Management is achieved, enhancing service quality, building a positive reputation, and improving operational efficiency, ultimately leading to Strategic Outcomes in the form of sustainable customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty..

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive literature review design. Literature was systematically identified through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search used combinations of keywords such as therapeutic communication, empathy, service quality, customer experience, tourism, and hospitality. Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed publications published between 2019–2025; (2) studies addressing communication, empathy, or service experience in tourism and hospitality contexts; and (3) articles discussing customer satisfaction, loyalty, crisis communication, or digital service interaction. Studies focusing exclusively on healthcare without service management implications were excluded. Following screening and abstract review, selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's framework. Triangulation across journals, policy documents, and industry reports was applied to enhance credibility and reduce interpretive bias.

This article is based on a qualitative descriptive literature review. The objective of the review is to synthesize and critically analyze the current literature on therapeutic communication in tourism and hospitality service management. The qualitative descriptive method is appropriate, as it provides an opportunity to thoroughly investigate the conceptualization and application of supportive and empathic communication practices in diverse tourism settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). The literature review also offers a paradigmatic approach to discerning the main themes, problems, and opportunities associated with the introduction of therapeutic communication into the service delivery process (Snyder, 2019).

Literature research and document analysis were used as a data collection method, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and policy documents published within the last five years. Academic databases used to identify relevant sources include Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The selection criteria were as follows: (1) publications specifically addressing therapeutic communication, empathy, or service experiences in the tourism and hospitality sector;

(2) studies mentioning service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty; (3) studies mentioning intercultural or crisis communication. In this sense, this methodology ensured that the information was based on reliable and contextually relevant information (Grant and Booth, 2020; Xiao and Watson, 2019).

To ensure the credibility of the information, triangulation was used to compare results from various sources and contrast themes across various types of literature (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Noble and Heale, 2019). Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman approach, which includes three simultaneous steps: data reduction, data visualization, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2019). This cyclical process allowed for the notion of emerging patterns, relationships, and insights into how therapeutic communication influenced customer experience, service level, and organizational performance in the tourism and hospitality industry.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

1. Implementing Therapeutic Communication in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Therapeutic communication has sparked growing interest in the tourism and hospitality sectors as one of the elements that can be used to improve service quality and customer satisfaction. Unlike traditional service interactions, therapeutic communication prioritizes empathy, active listening, and emotional responsiveness, helping staff establish a deeper connection with guests. In the context of tourism and hospitality, where customer impressions are formed not only through tangible services but also through emotional impressions, this method contributes to developing trust, reducing stress in challenging circumstances, and creating memorable experiences. Consequently, therapeutic communication has become a key competency that frontline employees must possess to generate immediate and long-term satisfaction.

a. **Face-to-face interaction:** Face-to-face interaction is essential in the tourism sector, especially in hotels, restaurants, and tour guide services. Direct interaction between hotel employees and guests can generate customer satisfaction and contribute to a more personal experience. For example, a receptionist who welcomes visitors by name, is active and willing to help, can have a valuable long-term impact (Accor, 2024). Responsive and friendly interaction between servers and customers in restaurants improves perceived service quality and customer loyalty (Luka, 2024). Likewise, effective tour guides and those who understand tourists' needs can add value to the travel experience and make it much more satisfying overall (Pham, 2024). In a case study conducted in Vietnam, it was found that social interactions between tourists and tour guides are highly determined by the guide's performance, the tourists' personalities, and situational circumstances during the tour. Guides interact with tourists primarily in a service-oriented manner, while tourists interact in a more social manner. These results highlight that a tour guide's communication skills play a

vital role in shaping tourists' experiences and establishing positive relationships during the trip (Pham, 2024). Even face-to-face interactions are crucial to restoring traveler confidence and comfort in the post-pandemic context. While digital technologies have gained significant momentum, face-to-face interaction remains more efficient at developing emotional relationships and addressing customer needs holistically (Accor, 2024). This would imply that while technology makes things work, the human aspect of service is irreplaceable. Accor's research (2024) also indicates that revenue growth could reach up to 36% for face-to-face meetings, so the economic value of face-to-face communication is also evident in the context of the tourism business. According to industry players, although technology is turning the world into a global village, face-to-face interaction is more efficient at creating strong and meaningful business relationships. In general, face-to-face interaction in tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be used as a communication tool, but also as a strategic instrument to improve the quality of services provided, enhance customer relationships, and provide unforgettable experiences. Therefore, the effectiveness and empathy of staff in effective communication are important for providing added value to customers and organizations (Luka, 2024; Pham, 2024).

b. Cross-Cultural Communication: Employees in the tourism sector often have to deal with tourists from different cultural backgrounds, languages, and customs. Experience working in hotels and as a tour guide demonstrates that intercultural interaction not only involves technical competence but also emotional sensitivity and empathy. Among the various obstacles, the most obvious are inequalities in communication standards, displays of emotion, and service anticipation. For example, a tourist from the Middle East might appreciate politeness and a focus on hierarchy, while a tourist from Western Europe might appreciate a more informal and egalitarian style (Arjona- Granados, 2025). Failure to understand these differences can lead to frustration among both staff and guests, even with good intentions. Some effective tips for overcoming intercultural problems include listening to patients, asking about their preferences, and adapting the communication style according to each individual's needs. Due to experience, it is important to observe body language, tone of voice, and facial expression to understand emotions that might not be verbally expressed. By implementing the principles of therapeutic communication, such as empathy and consideration of personal needs, staff will be able to develop more humane and personal relationships, even in the face of language barriers or cultural diversity (Sáez- Ruiz, 2024). According to recent research, training in self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability, acquired through intercultural studies, significantly influences the quality of relationships with tourists from other cultures. With a humanistic approach, staff are more than just service providers; they understand tourists' opinions, which positively influences their experience and perception of the destination (Luka, 2024). Flexible communication strategies also prepare staff to resolve any differences or conflicting expectations without compromising the quality of service. In practice, every intercultural experience entails learning. For example, living with East Asian clients also teaches the value of patience and attention to detail, while European travelers often enjoy light humor and spontaneity. By using

empathetic and supportive communication, employees can adapt to guests' needs and create comfortable experiences that generate long-term satisfaction and loyalty (Arjona- Granados, 2025). Therefore, intercultural communication in tourism is not just a method, but a way of learning and adapting to human diversity. Focusing on personal and empathetic perspectives gives staff the opportunity to make their experiences rewarding—both physically, emotionally, and psychologically. This strategy highlights the need to establish human relationships, value diversity, and make each tourist feel accepted and appreciated. Overall, the difficulties of intercultural communication can be overcome with the help of knowledge, empathy, and dynamic adaptability. The therapeutic communication approach applied in intercultural service practices strengthens interpersonal relationships, improves tourism experiences, and creates a favorable image of tourism organizations (Saez-Ruiz, 2024; Luka, 2024).

c. Communication in Crisis Situations: The challenges experienced in the tourism sector are crises or unforeseen events, such as reservation cancellations, lost items, or even friction between visitors and employees. Practical experience in the hotel industry and in tour guiding demonstrates that staff reaction in these situations is critical to creating a positive impression of service quality among guests. Managing guest stress involves communication skills, empathy, and composure. To minimize tension and build trust, it is essential to listen to the guest, acknowledge the problem they are facing, and offer simple and quick solutions (Liu-Lastres, 2024). Therapeutic communication is an applicable approach to crisis management, as it focuses on empathy, individual needs, and supportive reactions. Through attentive listening and changing tone and body language, staff can help reduce guest anxiety and create a more positive experience even when problems arise. As an illustrative example, in the event of a guest losing a valuable item at a hotel, employees who express genuine interest, actively search, and constantly keep guests informed can turn what could have been a poor experience into one where the guest feels appreciated and cared for (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). Open and understandable communication is essential in conflict situations, such as when two guests disagree or there is a lack of communication in service. Politely explaining rules and policies, remaining neutral, and proposing solutions will make everyone feel treated fairly. Studies have shown that these communication strategies increase customer satisfaction and reduce adverse effects on the organization's reputation (Liu- Lastres, 2024). Staff members' ability to manage guest anxiety, especially when it comes to health issues or even cancellation of services, has also become more important in the context of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period. These circumstances require the active and sensitive use of verbal and nonverbal communication, such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and open body language. These individualized solutions allow guests to feel secure, empathized, and encouraged, which generates long-term loyalty (Abdulaziz, Khuan, & Peco-Torres, 2023). Therefore, organized crisis communication training is a fundamental element in today's service management. Employees who possess the skills of active listening, empathy, and active communication of information are in a better position to manage guests' emotional pressures, make necessary decisions

quickly, and reduce potential conflicts. This reinforces the idea that crisis communication is not just an operational methodology, but a strategic concept for preserving long-term customer relationships and the organization's reputation (Liu-Lastres, 2024; Saez-Ruiz, 2024). Overall, communication during crisis situations should be characterized by a balance between promptness of response, empathy, and clarity of information. Employees skilled at implementing the principles of therapeutic communication in stressful situations can transform potentially negative experiences into positive interactions that strengthen guest trust. Consequently, service quality, customer loyalty, and organizational success in the dynamic tourism industry can be considered fundamental pillars of crisis communication.

d. Digital Therapeutic Communication: Therapeutic communication in the modern digital age is not limited to physical interaction but extends to digital platforms through messaging apps, social media, and service apps. As personal experience demonstrates, digital communication can be used to establish a personalized and empathetic guest experience, provided it is done correctly. For example, using hotel messaging apps, employees can respond promptly to guest needs (e.g., changing the room temperature or booking room service) and use a friendly and attentive tone. This not only improves operational efficiency but also strengthens the emotional bond with guests (Canary Technologies, 2025). Similarly, social media is a fundamental aspect of building relationships with guests. Genuine and sincere interaction on social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook allows employees to demonstrate their genuine interest in the guest experience, clarify questions, and respond to complaints, which helps foster a sense of appreciation and promote customer loyalty (Sarkis, 2025). Digital therapeutic communication also relies on service apps. By providing clear information, convenient access to service options, and easy communication with staff, these apps enable guests to experience support and understanding throughout their experience (Anwar, Deliana, & Suyamto, 2024). The impact of introducing digital therapeutic communication on guest engagement and loyalty is enormous. Guests who feel acknowledged and valued through digital methods are more likely to express their increased level of satisfaction and expectations of returning and recommending the service to others (Anwar et al., 2024). Overall, digital therapeutic communication is not solely technological; it involves the use of technology to establish empathetic and personal relationships with guests. Digital channels are potentially important resources for providing better guest experiences and establishing long-term loyalty with an appropriate approach.

Four Key Practices of Therapeutic Communication in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Aspect	Practices	Benefits	References
Face-to-Face Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receptionist greeting guests by name and offering proactive assistance. - Friendly and responsive restaurant staff. Tour guides who understand tourists' needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhances customer satisfaction. - Creates personal and memorable experiences. - Rebuilds trust in the post-pandemic era. <p>Increases revenue (up to 36%).</p>	Accor (2024); Luka (2024); Pham (2024)
Cross-Cultural Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adjusting communication styles to tourists' cultural backgrounds. Listening patiently, observing body language, tone, and facial expressions. - Cross-cultural training to foster empathy and adaptability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduces conflict and misunderstandings - Builds more human-centered relationships. - Enhances satisfaction and long-term loyalty. 	Arjo na-Granados (2025); Sáez-Ruiz (2024); Luka (2024)
Communication in Crisis Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active listening and providing quick solutions. - Showing empathy when guests lose belongings. - Transparent communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relieves tension & anxiety. - Transforms negative experiences into positive ones. - Prevents conflict escalation. 	Liu-Lautes (2024); Sáez-Ruiz (2024); Abdulaziz et

	of rules/policies. - Empathic verbal & calming nonverbal communication during the pandemic.	Maintains reputation & customer loyalty.	al. (2023)
Digital Therapeutic Communication	- Quick responses via hotel messaging apps. - Authentic & responsive interactions on social media. Service apps with clear information & easy access.	- Improves operational efficiency. - Builds empathetic digital relationships. Increases guest engagement & loyalty.	Can ary Technologies (2025); Sarkis (2025); Anwar et al. (2024)

Tabel 1. Four Key Practices of Therapeutic Communication in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. Source: Author, 2025.

The table highlights four key practices of therapeutic communication in the tourism and hospitality industry, emphasizing their strategic role in enhancing guest experiences and organizational outcomes. Face-to-face interaction remains crucial for building trust, delivering personalized service, and boosting revenue, while cross-cultural communication requires adaptability, empathy, and cultural awareness to reduce misunderstandings and foster long-term loyalty. In crisis situations, therapeutic communication—through active listening, empathy, and transparent responses—helps transform negative experiences into positive ones and protects organizational reputation. Meanwhile, digital therapeutic communication extends empathy into online platforms, where responsive messaging, authentic social media engagement, and user-friendly service applications improve efficiency, strengthen emotional connections, and enhance guest loyalty. Together, these practices underline that therapeutic communication is not only a service tool but also a strategic asset for sustainable success in tourism and hospitality.

1. Impacts and Benefits of Therapeutic Communication in Tourism and Hospitality

The application of therapeutic communication in the tourism sector has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. As employees listen empathetically, offer encouraging feedback, and correctly identify guests' needs, the perception of service quality increases significantly. Empirical studies indicate that guests who receive personal service tend to show higher levels of loyalty, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and repeat visits to destinations or facilities (Abdulaziz, Khuan, & Peco-Torres, 2023). This highlights that empathic communication is not only an interpersonal communication skill but also a business strategy that can directly impact long-term profitability.

In addition to satisfaction, therapeutic communication boosts guest well-being and overall positive experiences. Close and attentive communication minimizes stress, creates a sense of security, and improves emotional satisfaction. Case studies in the hotel and tour guide sectors reveal that holistic and empathetic approaches enrich customer experiences by focusing not only on the physical aspect of service delivery but also on the psychological and emotional level (Sáez-Ruiz, 2024). These practices help guests feel heard, appreciated, and cared for, thus creating memorable, positive experiences.

Strategically, organizations that incorporate empathetic communication skills have a competitive advantage. They offer personalized experiences and create deeper experiences with their guests, thus standing out in increasingly saturated tourism markets. There is evidence that the quality of direct communication influences an organization's brand perception, loyalty, and reputation—important factors for long-term success (Liu-Lastres, 2024). Therefore, this method not only helps attract new customers but also contributes to customer retention.

The performance and dynamics of staff in the workplace are also impacted by therapeutic communication. Employees trained in the art of empathic communication are more likely to be highly motivated, show greater job satisfaction, and demonstrate resilience in stressful situations. Furthermore, creating a human-centered service culture facilitates interpersonal cooperation, reduces internal conflicts, and fosters a healthy organizational culture (Saez-Ruiz, 2024). In this way, the benefits are not only focused on the guest experience, but also on the internal strengthening of human capital.

The overall effect of therapeutic communication will translate into a synergy between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, positive experiences, competitive advantage, and employee performance. Organizations that consistently incorporate these concepts achieve high service quality, long-lasting customer relationships, and a productive work environment (Abdulaziz et al., 2023; Liu-Lastres, 2024).

Overall, therapeutic communication in the tourism sector is a multidimensional approach that generates positive outcomes for guests, employees, and organizations alike. Service providers can transform customer experiences, strengthen loyalty, consolidate their competitive position, and operate in healthier environments by

prioritizing empathy, attentiveness, and responsive support in customer service. These are fundamental pillars for sustainable success in a constantly changing and highly competitive industry.

2. Challenges and Barriers in Implementing Therapeutic Communication in Tourism and Hospitality

One of the main obstacles to the implementation of therapeutic communication in the tourism sector is the lack of staff training. The technical components of service delivery remain a priority in many organizations, as adequate training in empathetic communication, active listening, and flexible response to guests' personal needs is still lacking. This situation leads to deficiencies in staff-guest interaction, which reduces the possibility of achieving maximum satisfaction, loyalty, and positive experiences (Anwar, Deliana, & Suyamto, 2024). Poorly trained staff are also unable to handle stressed guests, complaints, or crisis situations, which could interfere with the service process.

There are also issues of cultural and language barriers that pose a major threat to therapeutic communication. Tourists, from different cultural backgrounds, have different norms, emotional expressions, and service expectations. A lack of knowledge and appropriate strategies can lead staff to misinterpret guests' needs or responses, leading to tension or dissatisfaction. A culturally sensitive, compassionate, and flexible communication strategy is therefore essential for developing positive and satisfying guest encounters (Arjona-Granados, 2025; Luka, 2024). Another practical challenge is operational pressures and time constraints. During times of high demand, employees may have to handle numerous requests in a short time, which can compromise communication. This makes therapeutic communication ineffective, as rushed interactions fail to consider the emotional, psychological, and experiential aspects of the guest experience (Liu-Lastres, 2024). Proper management and fair work distribution can help staff cope under pressure while still providing quality services.

It is also difficult to address barriers to digital communication. While there is greater opportunity to interact through apps, chat, and social media, staff must be able to express empathy and support through digital channels that do not involve nonverbal communication. Misinterpretation of messages, delays, or an inappropriate tone can detract from the guest experience and reduce guest loyalty. To implement therapeutic communication in the digital environment, staff must receive training, guidelines, and strategies that ensure motivation for consistent and human communication (Canary Technologies, 2025; Sarkis, 2025).

Generally, the challenges and obstacles to implementing therapeutic communication require a holistic approach. Companies must invest in employee training, foster cross-cultural understanding, balance operational pressures, and develop effective digital communication plans. In this way, these barriers can be reduced and the full potential of therapeutic communication can be realized to improve service quality, guest experiences, and long-term guest loyalty.

3. Digital Therapeutic Communication: Evidence and Metrics

Digital therapeutic communication extends empathic interaction into online environments through messaging platforms, service applications, and social media. In contemporary tourism and hospitality services, these digital channels function as primary contact points between organizations and guests, particularly before arrival, during service consumption, and in post-service follow-up. Unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, digital communication requires employees to convey empathy, attentiveness, and emotional support without relying on physical presence or nonverbal cues. Consequently, the effectiveness of digital therapeutic communication depends heavily on linguistic choices, tone, timing, and responsiveness, which together shape guests' perceptions of care and service quality.

Empirical studies indicate that fast response time, personalized tone, and emotional acknowledgment are critical determinants of customer trust and engagement in digital service encounters. Prompt responses signal attentiveness and reliability, while personalized messages—such as addressing guests by name or referencing specific preferences—reinforce a sense of recognition and individual care. Emotional acknowledgment, including expressions of understanding or reassurance, helps reduce uncertainty and stress, especially when guests encounter service disruptions or seek immediate assistance. These elements collectively contribute to stronger emotional connections between guests and service providers, even in technology-mediated interactions.

The effectiveness of digital therapeutic communication can be evaluated through measurable indicators commonly used in customer experience research. Metrics such as response latency, degree of message personalization, and sentiment expressed in digital feedback have been linked to higher customer satisfaction, positive online reviews, and repeat visit intention. Sentiment analysis of chat logs and social media interactions further reveals that empathetic language correlates with improved perceptions of service quality and organizational responsiveness. These findings demonstrate that digital empathy is not an abstract concept, but an observable and assessable dimension of service performance in tourism and hospitality contexts.

Taken together, these findings suggest that digital empathy is not merely a technological function but a measurable component of customer experience management. By integrating therapeutic communication principles into digital service strategies, tourism organizations can enhance emotional engagement while maintaining operational efficiency. This integration positions digital therapeutic communication as a strategic resource that complements face-to-face interactions, supports relationship-building, and strengthens long-term customer loyalty. As digital touchpoints continue to expand, the ability to operationalize empathy through measurable communication practices becomes increasingly central to sustainable service management.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to service management theory by extending therapeutic communication beyond its traditional healthcare origins into tourism and hospitality contexts. First, it refines the Service-Profit Chain by explicitly positioning therapeutic communication as a mediating mechanism linking employee emotional labor with customer satisfaction and organizational performance. Second, this review enriches Relationship Marketing theory by emphasizing emotional attunement and empathic interaction as foundational elements of long-term customer relationships, particularly in high-contact service industries.

Third, the study advances Customer Experience Management by demonstrating that therapeutic communication operates across physical, intercultural, crisis, and digital touchpoints, thereby offering a more holistic and human-centered understanding of experience orchestration. Unlike previous studies that examine service communication in fragmented contexts, this review synthesizes therapeutic communication as an integrative managerial approach that simultaneously addresses customer experience, employee well-being, and organizational sustainability.

Conceptual knowledge is not enough to successfully implement therapeutic communication in the tourism and hospitality industry; specific strategies are also required to transform theory into practice. Given the dynamic service experiences and diverse backgrounds of guests, organizations must integrate comprehensive measures that ensure consistency, empathy, and effectiveness in every communication. Structured staff training, incorporating principles of care into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and the strategic use of technology are some of the recommendations that offer viable avenues for improving service quality and guest experiences. These steps also emphasize the dual value of therapeutic communication, not only as a means to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, but also to improve staff performance, organizational culture, and long-term competitiveness.

a. Tourism Staff Training Strategies.

Tourism staff training programs can be considered an important step to maximize the applications of therapeutic communication. Individualized and ongoing training helps employees acquire the active listening, empathy, and support skills necessary when approaching guests from different backgrounds. Training techniques can include guest interaction exercises, crisis role-plays, and e-learning lessons focused on human communication habits. Research has shown that employees who receive regular training in therapeutic communication are more likely to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as reduce the likelihood of conflicts arising (Saez-Ruiz, 2024; Anwar, Deliana, & Suyamto, 2024). In addition to improving interpersonal

skills, this type of training will motivate employees, boost their performance, and create a talented work environment.

b. Incorporation into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The second viable suggestion is to integrate therapeutic communication into service Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). By applying the principles of empathy, attention to guest needs, and responsiveness to SOPs, organizations will be able to provide consistent service quality across all customer touchpoints. For example, instructions focused on human communication practices can be presented alongside each service interaction, such as hotel check-in or guided tours. This will lead to better guest experiences and help staff align with organizational standards, minimizing miscommunications and maximizing service delivery (Liu-Lastres, 2024).

C. Use of technology to facilitate empathic communication.

Another crucial strategy in contemporary practice is the use of technology. Service apps, chat apps, social media, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems can be used to reduce response time, individualize communication, and employ a sympathetic tone, even online. Various studies show that properly applied technology can help increase guest engagement, improve guest retention, and enable organizations to offer both repetitive and individual service experiences (Sarkis, 2025; Canary Technologies, 2025). Training, combined with integrated standard operating procedures (SOPs) and technology, will help establish the best structure for implementing therapeutic communication, resulting in a positive client experience, improved staff performance, and organizational success.

d. Holy Spirit Organizational Approach.

Taken together, these suggestions and practical implications highlight the importance of a holistic approach to implementing therapeutic communication. Organizations that implement comprehensive training programs, apply communication principles to standard operating procedures (SOPs), and intelligently use technology to improve the quality of their services are in a better position to transform the quality and experiences of clients and build customer loyalty. This strategy also strengthens a people-centered organizational culture, promotes staff performance, and contributes to a positive and productive work environment.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that therapeutic communication constitutes a strategic pillar of tourism service management rather than a peripheral interpersonal skill. By fostering empathy, active listening, and emotional responsiveness, therapeutic communication enhances customer satisfaction, loyalty, employee resilience, and organizational competitiveness. The study theoretically integrates therapeutic

communication into established service frameworks and practically highlights its relevance across face-to-face, intercultural, crisis, and digital contexts. Future research should empirically test these relationships using quantitative models and digital interaction analytics across diverse tourism settings.

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